

# **Advising Guidance**

## **Clinical Psychology**

**Winthrop Psychology Department (10/2006)**

### **PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES**

Clinical Psychology, the largest subfield in psychology, focuses on the assessment and treatment of mental illness. Clinical Psychologists also provide adjunctive care for persons diagnosed with non-mental medical conditions (e.g., cancer, diabetes, etc.). Research, administration/supervision, consultation, and teaching are among additional activities for these professionals.

### **TRAINING REQUIREMENTS**

Clinical Psychologists are licensed to practice by individual states. All states require doctoral level training, a clinical internship, one to two years of postdoctoral supervised clinical experience, and successful completion of written (EPPP) and oral licensure examinations. Doctoral training typically takes five or six years, and the licensure process takes a couple more years. Once licensed, clinical psychologists – like other health care professionals – must engage in “continuing education” each year to maintain the license.

### **ADMISSION TO TRAINING PROGRAMS**

Accredited Ph.D. programs in clinical psychology admit approximately 8% of applicants; the admissions rate is considerably higher for Psy.D. programs (Norcross et al., 2005). Applications always include the GRE General Test, undergraduate transcript, letters of recommendation, an application form and a writing sample of some sort. Since the GRE Subject Test is required by approximately half of graduate programs in clinical psychology, applicants should plan to take both the general test and the subject test. Some programs include a face-to-face interview as a later step in the process for finalists, while some programs focus exclusively on “data” in the application (Fauber, 2006). Undergraduate internships are unlikely to help in the admissions process for a clinical psychology program. Research experience, however, appears to strengthen an application. Admission to an accredited Ph.D. program at a traditional university is typically accompanied by an overall GPA above 3.50 and GRE scores (V+Q) above 1200.

### **RECOMMENDED UNDERGRADUATE PREPARATION**

In most cases, the choice of a minor will have no effect on the strength of an application to a clinical psychology program. A strong science background and fluency in second language may be helpful. Courses typically found in a classical psychology curriculum are advisable: (beyond general, 198, stats, and methods) abnormal, developmental, biological, cognition, learning, history & systems, social, either personality or measurement, and undergraduate research (471/472 would count as general elective credit).

### **PATHWAYS**

Some students proceed directly from college to a doctoral program. Typically, these students have extremely strong records (GPA, GRE, published research, etc.). Some students work in social service or business for a couple of years before applying to graduate school. Many students complete a masters program in a related area (counseling or any area of psychology), and seek to use their strong masters record to bolster their application to a doctoral program; whether a masters degree helps with doctoral applications appears to vary across doctoral programs (Bonifazi, 1997). Interestingly, a lot of people find excellent career opportunities with a master’s degree and decide not to pursue doctoral training.

### **CAUTION**

Not all clinical psychology training programs are created equal. The number of programs has exploded, with many new ones being offered in “storefront” fashion. Admission to these programs is relatively easier, but non-loan financial aid is much less likely. The typical graduate of a Psy.D. program incurs over \$100,000 in debt (based on APA, 2005). Graduates of Psy.D. programs (especially at for-profit professional schools) are significantly less likely to perform adequately on the EPPP licensure exam than graduates of Ph.D. programs at traditional universities (Peterson, 2003). While the absence of APA accreditation is a definite danger signal, the presence of accreditation does not insure quality. Furthermore, the prominence of clinical psychology has led some universities in the last decade to include the term in the title of masters programs. It is important to understand that graduation from a masters program will not prepare a person to practice clinical psychology (graduates cannot be licensed as or even call themselves clinical psychologists; typically, they gain licensure as counselors).

### **ALTERNATIVE AREAS**

Persons interested in clinical psychology should also learn about the following professions and discuss them with their advisors: Psychiatry, Counseling Psychology, Counselor Education, School Psychology, Marriage and Family Therapy, Mental Health Counseling, Social Work, Physician Assistance, Pastoral Counseling, and Nursing.

*Sample Plan on Back*

## Sample Plan for Student Interested in Clinical Psychology Programs

This sample should be approached with flexibility. However, students will be well served on the GRE general test and with applications if they complete PSYC requirements in the fall semester of the senior year. No matter whether the student enrolls in Undergraduate Research (471/472) for general elective credit, the student should begin intensive research work during the junior year and continue that work through the senior year.

	<b>FALL</b>	<b>SPRING</b>
<b>FIRST</b>	General Psychology <i>General Education Courses</i>	Psychology as a Discipline <i>General Education Courses</i>
<b>SOPHOMORE</b>	Statistics Developmental Psychology <i>General Education Courses</i>	Research Methods Social Psychology <i>General Education Courses</i>
<b>JUNIOR</b>	Biological Psychology Abnormal Psychology Personality or Measurement <i>Minor Courses</i> <i>General Education Courses</i>	Principles of Learning Cognition Undergraduate Research* <i>Minor Courses</i>
<b>SENIOR</b>	History & Systems <i>Minor Courses</i> <i>Electives Courses</i> [GRE General test NLT October] [GRE Subject test in December]	<i>Minor Courses</i> <i>Electives Courses</i>

\* In this particular case, research credit counts as a general elective (see page 41 of the 2006-7 catalog).